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THE MUSICAL TIMES,

And Singing Class Circular.

AUGUST 1, 1868.

INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF BEETHOVEN.

By R. M. HAYLEY.

(Continued from p. 442.)

BEETHOVEN'S acquaintance with Ferdinand Ries commenced in 1800, when the former was thirty, and in the height of his reputation. Beethoven had been acquainted with his father Franz Ries, who was first violinist in the Elector's Chapel at Bonn. The young man was only fifteen, and his father had sent him to Vienna to profit by the instruction of his celebrated townsman. When he waited on Beethoven and presented his letter of introduction, he found him employed upon the Oratorio of *The Mount of Olives*, then about to be produced. Beethoven having looked over the letter, remarked, "I cannot at this moment write to your father, but tell him that I have not forgotten my mother's death. This answer will suffice for the present." Ries afterwards learnt that his father, when Beethoven's mother died, had rendered assistance to the family, then in distressed circumstances. His subsequent conduct to Ries was kind and friendly in the extreme; and in spite of his unconquerable repugnance to teaching, he devoted himself zealously to his young friend's education; and, what is more remarkable, notwithstanding his hasty and impetuous temper, he gave Ries these lessons with the utmost mildness and patience.

Ries gives an interesting account of the production of Beethoven's first Oratorio. On the day of the performance, Beethoven sent for him at five in the morning. He found him sitting up in bed writing, and, on asking what was wanted, received the laconic reply, "Trumpets," and it is a fact, that the very sheets on which the composer was then writing, were afterwards made use of at the concert. The rehearsal began at eight o'clock, and it included, besides the Oratorio, several other compositions of Beethoven. It was a very tedious affair. At half-past two, all the musicians were exhausted, and began to exhibit signs of dissatisfaction. Their spirits were, however, now revived by an abundant supply of refreshments, which had been provided by Prince Lichnowsky, who had attended the rehearsal from the commencement, and they made another attempt to go through the Oratorio. "It is the first thing of the kind that Beethoven has done," said the Prince, "and it must be performed in a manner worthy of him." At length, about six o'clock, the concert commenced, and the fame of Beethoven was from thenceforward established.

Several circumstances combined to produce in the mind of the great composer a continuous melancholy, which caused much uneasiness and apprehension amongst his friends. Hitherto he had had to combat with the jealousy and detraction of rival musicians, but he had now an additional ground for depression in the impaired state of his bodily health, which weighed upon his spirits, and gave an habitual gloom to the tenor of his thoughts and conversation. Early in the year 1796 a disordered condition of the digestive organs began to manifest itself, accompanied by other maladies, whilst an increasing deafness was the source of unspeakable trouble,

poisoning every enjoyment of life, and embittering the remainder of his days. A minute description of his sufferings is contained in a letter addressed to Dr. Wegeler, who was afterwards the husband of his friend and pupil Leonora Von de Brenning. It was written after a residence of eight years at Vienna, (29th June, 1800,) and may serve as a true picture of Beethoven's noble and grateful nature, although the allusion he makes to his afflictions is painful in the extreme. After reproaching himself for his long silence, he writes, "How heartily I thank you for your remembrance of me! I deserve it so little, and have sought so little to deserve it, and yet you are so good, and are not deterred, even by my unpardonable negligence from doing me good, but remain ever the same faithful, generous, friend. That I could ever forget you, or any of those who were once so dear, oh! do not believe it. My birth-place, the lovely spot where I first saw the light, rises still as fair and distinct before my eyes as the day I left you. I shall esteem it one of the most fortunate events in my life, when I see you again, and once more greet old father Rhine. When this will be, I cannot yet say with certainty; but this much I can say, that when you do see me, you will find me greatly improved. You will not find me greater, as an artist, but better as a man; and if the prosperity of my native place has revived, my art shall be exercised only for the benefit of the poor. Oh, happy moment! What happiness to be able to procure the satisfaction of such a moment! What happiness, that I can myself create it!" We need not wonder at this burst of enthusiasm and generosity; for since he had left Bonn, his worldly circumstances had greatly improved, as he proceeds to inform his friend. "You wish to know something of my present position. It is not so very bad. Prince Lichnowsky, who has always been my warmest friend, in spite of the occasional misunderstandings between us, has, ever since last year, set apart the sum of 600 florins, upon which I can draw until I am enabled to find a suitable situation. My compositions bring me in a great deal; and I must tell you there is a greater demand for them than I can satisfy. I could have even six or more publishers for every thing I write, if I cared about it. They make now no agreement with me. I demand and am paid. You see what a fine thing I make of it. For example, when I see a friend in want, and my purse does not permit me to assist him at the moment, I have only to sit down to work and he is shortly relieved. Besides, I am more economical than formerly." But in the midst of all this comfort and kindness of heart, there was a sad drawback to his happiness in the precarious state of his health, and his continued difficulty of hearing, eventually ended in total deafness. On this subject he thus writes in the letter referred to:—"The envious demon of ill-health has played me an ugly trick. My hearing has become worse and worse, during the last three years. . . . What will be the end of it Heaven only knows. If this continues, I will come to you next spring. You will take a house for me in some pretty place in the country, and for half a year I will be a peasant. Perhaps this will cure me. Resignation! What a resource! but nothing else remains." His difficulty of hearing, Beethoven imagined, was in some way connected with the complaint under which he had for years laboured; and he therefore placed himself under the best medical treatment, with a view of reinstating

his bodily health; but, to his dismay, he found the latter improved whilst the state of his hearing remained the same. It was a calamity, which of all others, he felt the most; and in later letters, when the affliction had attained its height, he never ceases to allude to it.

Beethoven was not long in Vienna before he found an active friend and patron in Prince Lichnowsky, already mentioned. This nobleman received him into his house, where he continued to reside till the year 1799. The Prince was a great patron of art, and an excellent judge of music. He played the piano, and diligently studied the works of Beethoven, performing them with great ability. He endeavoured to convince the young artist, whose attention was frequently directed by others to the difficulty of his compositions, that there was nothing in his style which required amendment. Every Friday the Prince had a *matinée musicale* at his residence. Besides four other musicians whom he engaged for the occasion, Beethoven was usually present, and gladly heard their criticisms upon his works. It was here the great compositions were first brought into notice, and many persons had thus an opportunity of hearing him play. It was on one of these occasions that Haydn heard him perform the three sonatas, which Beethoven had dedicated to him. The rapidity with which Beethoven played at sight the most difficult music was the theme of universal astonishment, and when once it was remarked to him that he had played a *presto* passage which he had never seen before, so quickly that he could not possibly have read the successive notes, he is reported to have replied "That is not at all necessary. When you read quickly there may be a thousand mistakes in the printing; but you take no notice of them if you do but know the language."

So great was the progress made by Beethoven after the advantages which he had had in the sound instruction of Albrechtsberger, and subsequently from the great master Haydn, that in a few years he had laid the foundation of his fame, as a musician, by a series of productions which reflect equal honour on the teachers and the scholar. After the death in 1801, of the Elector of Cologne, to whose kind assistance Beethoven was greatly indebted for his success, he found himself definitively settled at Vienna, a city for which he had always felt a partiality, although had his native city presented the same advantages, his affection for the friends and scenes of his boyhood would have prompted him to make it the place of his abode in preference. All anxiety as to the means of subsistence were now at an end, for his popularity as a composer was so great that he had a ready sale for all his works, and received whatever he demanded for them. Nor lacked he the power of expressing the ideas which burned within him, for with a soul for music which caught its inspirations amidst the beautiful scenes of nature, whose charms he had always loved, he composed with the greatest ease. In the open air beneath the canopy of heaven, and amidst all that could fire his ardent imagination, he conceived those thrilling melodies which have made his name so celebrated. His ideas were committed to writing on the spot, to be afterwards developed and extended, and this accounts for that freshness and propriety by which his music is distinguished. His consummate art was in overcoming difficulties, and his playing, though not at all times remarkable for delicacy, was always

brilliant. He possessed the uncommon power of varying his subject and carrying it to the very extent of completeness. In this respect, except by Mozart, he was unequalled amongst modern players.

One would have imagined that Beethoven, possessed of such an ample income as he was gaining by his profession, would not have been troubled by pecuniary difficulties; but this was not always the case. Though brought up in straitened circumstances, and often dependent upon the bounty of others, he did not know the value of money, and was at times anything but economical. This was the case particularly during his residence with Prince Lichnowsky. The dinner hour was four o'clock; but to appear at table at that hour was regarded by Beethoven as a kind of limitation of his freedom, and an irksome restraint against which his wayward nature rebelled. He, consequently, often went and dined by himself at a tavern, where he had to pay an exorbitant price for very much worse fare than his kind host had provided.

The peculiar irritability of his temper was often in striking contrast with an overstatement of liberality, which frequently involved him in awkward embarrassments. The consequence was that, after the first ebullition of anger was over, he could be induced to listen to a reasonable explanation of the matter in dispute, then his apologies would be disproportioned to the offence he had committed. Many of his peculiarities arose from two causes. Constantly wrapped up as he was in his musical ideas, he was totally ignorant of business and domestic economy, and knew very little of what was passing around him; in addition to this, his deafness made him suspicious, and led him to think that he was always being imposed upon. The violence of his temper on some occasions led to the most unpleasant scenes. He often had quarrels with the waiters of taverns and coffee-houses, whom he would denounce as thieves and pickpockets, and ultimately had to make his peace by a handsome *douceur*. In places where he was known, people became accustomed to his eccentricities, and gave him his own way. His letters from this time became more and more desponding. He occasionally, for a short time, regained a happier frame of mind, but the momentary serenity soon vanished when he looked forward to the future, and saw no consolation in the prospect. His hope of ever attaining perfect health became fainter and fainter, as he perceived that many of his favourite schemes were never to be realized. Writing in this mood to a friend, he said, "I lead a somewhat more pleasant life now. You can scarcely conceive how desolate and dreary my life has been for the last two years. My infirmity has haunted me like a spectre; I fled from men and became a misanthrope, in spite of myself, for it is not my nature. This change has been wrought by a dear charming girl whom I love, and by whom I am loved in return. During the two past years I have again lived some happy moments, and for the first time I have felt that marriage would make me happy. Not that I could marry just now; I must still roam about a little more. If it were not for my ears, I should have long ago travelled over half the world, and now I must begin. For me there is no greater pleasure than to work at my profession, and exhibit the result to the world. Do not believe that I should be happy with you in Bonn. What could make me happier there? Your very care of me would annoy

me. I should continually read compassion in your face, and feel myself still more miserable."

There is a remarkable contrast between such despairing lines as these and the business-like character and humour which characterized the letters written by Beethoven, during the early part of his residence at Vienna. At that time his creative power was in full maturity; and in a letter addressed to a musician and publisher at Leipzig, he thus writes:—"Right heartily do I thank you for the good opinion you have formed of me and my productions, and I often wish that I may deserve it. I am likewise glad to hear of your undertakings, and wish that if money could be made in our profession it might rather fall to the lot of genuine artists than flow into the coffers of mere shop-keepers. Your intention of publishing the works of Sebastian Bach does my heart good, which beats in unison with the great and noble works of that Patriarch of music. I hope, as soon as we hear that golden peace is proclaimed, to be able to contribute greatly to the success of the undertaking, should you seek subscribers." In a merrier mood he thus wrote to the same friend, to whom he had become reconciled after a short estrangement, from the latter having lent too ready an ear to some idle rumours detrimental to Beethoven's character. "Are you all mad, gentlemen? To propose to me to write such a sonata! If it had been during the fury of the revolution—but now, when the world is returning to its old routine, when Buonaparte has concluded a concordat with the Pope!—a sonata now! If it had been a *messa a tre voce*, or vespers, I should then have instantly taken pen in hand, and have written off a *credo* at once. But such a sonata in these renaissance Christian times!"

This gaiety, not unfrequently, was followed by great nervous irritability, which was chiefly encouraged by a return of his bodily sufferings. It was about this period that he completed his third symphony (*sinfonia eroica*) whilst residing at Neulejensstadt, a village near Vienna. In composing, Beethoven often endeavoured to concentrate his ideas upon some particular locality, or object, so as to give his music a definite aim. But, notwithstanding this, he was in the habit of ridiculing and abusing what he termed, "musical painting." Even the greatest master-pieces, like Haydn's *Creation* and *Seasons*, did not escape his censure upon this score; although he was always disposed to acknowledge Haydn's great merit, especially in his Choruses, which Beethoven could not find words sufficiently to extol.

It was during the composition of the Symphony just alluded to, that the object evoked by his imagination was Napoleon Buonaparte, who at that time was only First Consul. Beethoven's admiration of him was very great, and he was accustomed to compare him with the consuls of antiquity in the time of the Romans. The score of the Symphony lay upon his table. On the title page, at the top, was inscribed the word, "Buonaparte," and at the bottom, "Louis v. Beethoven." The intervening space was entirely blank, and it was a question amongst his friends as to how the *hiatus* would be filled up. One of them at length brought him the intelligence that Buonaparte had created himself Emperor. On hearing this Beethoven fell into a rage, and exclaimed, "He is nothing but a common man—he will now trample under foot all the rights of mankind merely to gra-

tify his own ambition. He will now place himself higher than every one. He will be a tyrant." With these words Beethoven snatched the title page of the Symphony from the table, tore it into pieces, and threw them on the ground.

During Beethoven's residence at Vienna, Steibelt, of the Imperial Chapel at St. Petersburg, after having made a considerable stay at Paris, arrived there. Beethoven's friends were alarmed lest the presence of so celebrated a composer, then in the zenith of his fame, should detract from the reputation of their own *protégé*. Much interest was therefore excited by the expected competition between the two artists. It was at a musical party given by Count Fries, that the two rivals met for the first time. Beethoven played his trio in B flat (op. 11.), which had not been previously heard, but is now amongst the most popular of his works. Steibelt listened condescendingly, and paid the author some compliments with the air of a man convinced of his own superiority. He then played a quintet of his own composition, and afterwards extemporized, producing much effect with his *tremolo* chords, which were then quite a novelty. Beethoven was urged to play again, but refused. A few days after the performers met again at the house of Count Fries. Steibelt, after having, with much applause, played another quintet, commenced a brilliant fantasia, for which he took as a subject the Italian air, which forms the theme of Beethoven's variations in the above-mentioned trio. This was a pointed challenge, which so provoked Beethoven's friends that they importuned him to take up the gauntlet. He was so irritated by this deliberate act of defiance, that he held back no longer, but moved towards the pianoforte, and seizing the violoncello part of Steibelt's quintet, which was lying on the music-stand, turned it (designedly or by accident) upside down. With one finger he struck a few notes from the part before him, from which he formed a subject, and yielding to the inspiration of the moment, poured forth such a torrent of bright and beautiful thoughts, that Steibelt, confounded and overwhelmed, left the room before he had finished. From that time he avoided Beethoven's presence, and never accepted an invitation, except on the express condition that his rival was not to be of the party.

Beethoven, for the most part, exhibited a kindness of disposition; but he was at times excessively irritable, and nothing annoyed him more than any failure in the performance of his compositions. At one of his concerts, at which he produced for the first time a fantasia for the pianoforte, with orchestral accompaniments, and a chorus, the player of the clarionet miscounted eight bars; and as it was a solo passage, the blunder was the more apparent. Beethoven started up in a rage, and abused the band so vociferously as to be heard by the whole of the audience. "Once more," he at length exclaimed, in a voice of thunder, and the musicians overawed by his stern looks and commanding tone, submissively obeyed. The whole was now repeated, and with the most perfect success; but no sooner was the concert over than the performers, indignant at the treatment they had received, mutinied *en masse*, and declared that they would never again play under his direction. Their anger, however, was but of short duration; for no sooner had Beethoven finished a new composition than curiosity got the better of resentment, and they were perfectly willing to perform it

under his leadership. On another occasion a similar scene took place, but this time the orchestra were beyond measure enraged, and persisted in refusing to play under the guidance of Beethoven; so that, desirous of hearing the rehearsal of his piece, and yet compelled not to be present, he was obliged to remain in the ante-room. It was a long time before this quarrel could be made up.

The capricious and peevish nature of Beethoven's character was noticed by all with whom he came into contact, and was the source of great trouble to his friends. Albrechtsberger, with whom he studied counterpoint, and Salieri, who instructed him in composition, agreed in lamenting this peculiarity of his disposition. He was so wayward that he paid little attention to the subjects of study placed before him; and thus he had to learn by experience what might have been arrived at by a much shorter road, had he chosen to be guided by the judgment of others. He was not singular in acting upon the mistaken notion that rules are the fetters of genius. Rossini was a careless student, and used to annoy his master, the venerable Padre Mattie, as much as Beethoven did Albrechtsberger, trusting for his harmonious effects more to the guidance of his own perceptions than to the *dicta* of theorists. When in reading over his scores, he observed an infringement of some rule, instead of correcting it, he would mark it with a cross, writing on the margin "*Per soddisfazione del pedante.*" "For the satisfaction of the pedants!" The fact is that theorists sometimes attach so much importance to arbitrary rules, that beginners, in the warmth of their imagination, are disgusted by them, and endeavour to avoid all restraint by yielding to no authority, except some inward impulse of their own in matters of taste and propriety. "The best and soundest rules," it has been well observed,—"even those which are susceptible of the most general application—must sometimes yield to the impulse of that high order of genius which can 'snatch a grace beyond the reach of art;' but the frequent disregard of the laws of harmony, as established and taught in the schools, which we find in the works of modern musicians, is in a great measure the fault of those laws themselves, many of which are no longer applicable to the practice of composition. We cannot indeed, conceive anything more absurd than the present system of scholastic discipline, to which the young musician is subject. After his genius has been cramped and confined by a long course of precepts, restrictions, and prohibitions founded on the practice of the seventeenth century, he is told that most of them are antiquated and obsolete, and that there is no longer any occasion to mind them." No wonder, therefore, that a man with the exuberant fancy of Beethoven should have looked with distrust upon a study which tended to cramp his fertile imagination, and we must forgive his boldness and independence, though exercised at the risk of a sacrifice of the first principles of his art.

(To be continued.)

SACRED MUSIC.

BY HENRY C. LUNN.

IN our juvenile days we remember sitting at a window in the house of a serious lady, when an organ in the street began to peal forth the most doleful succession of sounds ever put together by mortal in the most excruciating moments of his grief. Our

involuntary expression of horror at the infliction was, however, immediately succeeded by abject contrition for the utterance of any opinion upon the composition; for we were angrily told that it was "sacred music;" and therefore it was not to be expected that we should derive any agreeable sensation from hearing it. Even in these early days, this frank confession of the mission of "sacred music," appeared strange to us. We had been taught to believe that religion was the solace of man during his brief sojourn upon the earth—that his moments of sadness were made happier, and even his moments of gladness tempered and subdued by the benign influence of his pure and steadfast faith. If, we reasoned with ourselves, religion be really compounded of gratitude and hope, how can this be religious music; for assuredly the only gratitude we felt was when it had ceased, and the only hope it raised was an intense one that we should never hear it again. Years have rolled on since then; but who can ever forget these early impressions; and who, indeed, can even doubt that much of the feeling we have mentioned still lingers with a large number of the middle classes? Are there not many persons who will listen with resignation to compositions containing not even the germ of religious inspiration, provided they are told that the word "sacred" is engraved upon the title-page? And if this class exist, is it not likely that it will be liberally supplied with the article it requires? Weigl, the composer, was once asked why he did not write any more operas: "Ah," he answered, with a sigh, "I am getting old; I have no more ideas; I now only write Church Music." If our readers ask for some specimens of the individuals who are satisfied with the mere outward semblance of a faith, let them search even in the advertisement columns of a daily newspaper, and they will be at once assured of their existence. We select one, which appeared a short time since.

TWO DRAPERS' ASSISTANTS.—WANTED, a Young Man, of Christian principles, to dress fancy millinery and silk windows for a first-class pushing house of business. Apply to —.

It would be curious to enquire how this immaculate young gentleman's Christian principles are to be shown in action. Being fully impressed with the vanity of worldly display and undue love of finery, how can he do violence to his feelings by dressing "fancy millinery and silk windows" with all the colours of the rainbow? Again, is not a "pushing" house of business rather opposed to his avowed principles of peace and good-will to all mankind? Why, this is positively advertising for a martyr.

Whilst serious words can pass for religion, is it to be wondered at that sombre notes should pass for religious music? It may be asserted that sacred music must not be frivolous: certainly not; but that is no reason that it should be depressing. No one can say that Handel's air, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," for instance, is secular; but the music, so far from expressing despondency, is as instinct with the cheerfulness of a pure and confident hope as the words to which it is allied. Composers who have true religion in their hearts, give earnest expression to their faith through the medium of music which shall move the feelings of others in sympathy with their own; but mere writers for the religious market, to be serious must be dull; and, the trick of "sacred" harmonies once learnt, any amount of religious music can be thrown off in any given time,